Ten years ago, in the blink of an eye between my dad dying and my mom soon to follow, I was tasked with cleaning out their home of many decades as part of caring for them through sickness and death. The easiest solution, and most intuitively anarchistic one, was to do a make-an-offer "yard sale" right in the house itself. Yet in the down-and-out economy of Michigan, it quickly became apparent I needed to turn it into a really, really free market. Over the course of a week, hundreds of folks dug through the whole house from attic to the basement, which I'd remade into a theater/forest so long ago, and took what they wanted. In the process, people told me their hard-luck stories, and I listened; then they wanted to hear about my losses, and they listened. They also joyfully shared their finds with me, from a teenager who eagerly snagged the same typewriter I'd used as a teen, saying they wanted to be a writer, to the people without health insurance who'd discovered leftover medical supplies from my parents' illnesses that they themselves greatly needed, to the person who carted off what to me looked like sheer garbage, saving me the trouble.

Toward the end, one person lugged a dilapidated, musty cardboard box up from the cellar and plopped it in front of me. A huge grin spread across their face as they opened the box to reveal hundreds of fabric patches, a bit faded, but still bringing together geometries of purple and turquoise, pink and green, red and black, into pleasing designs. "Wow, I love these! Can I take them home?" they exclaimed. "Maybe I can invite a bunch of my friends over for a potluck and together we can all make a quilt!"

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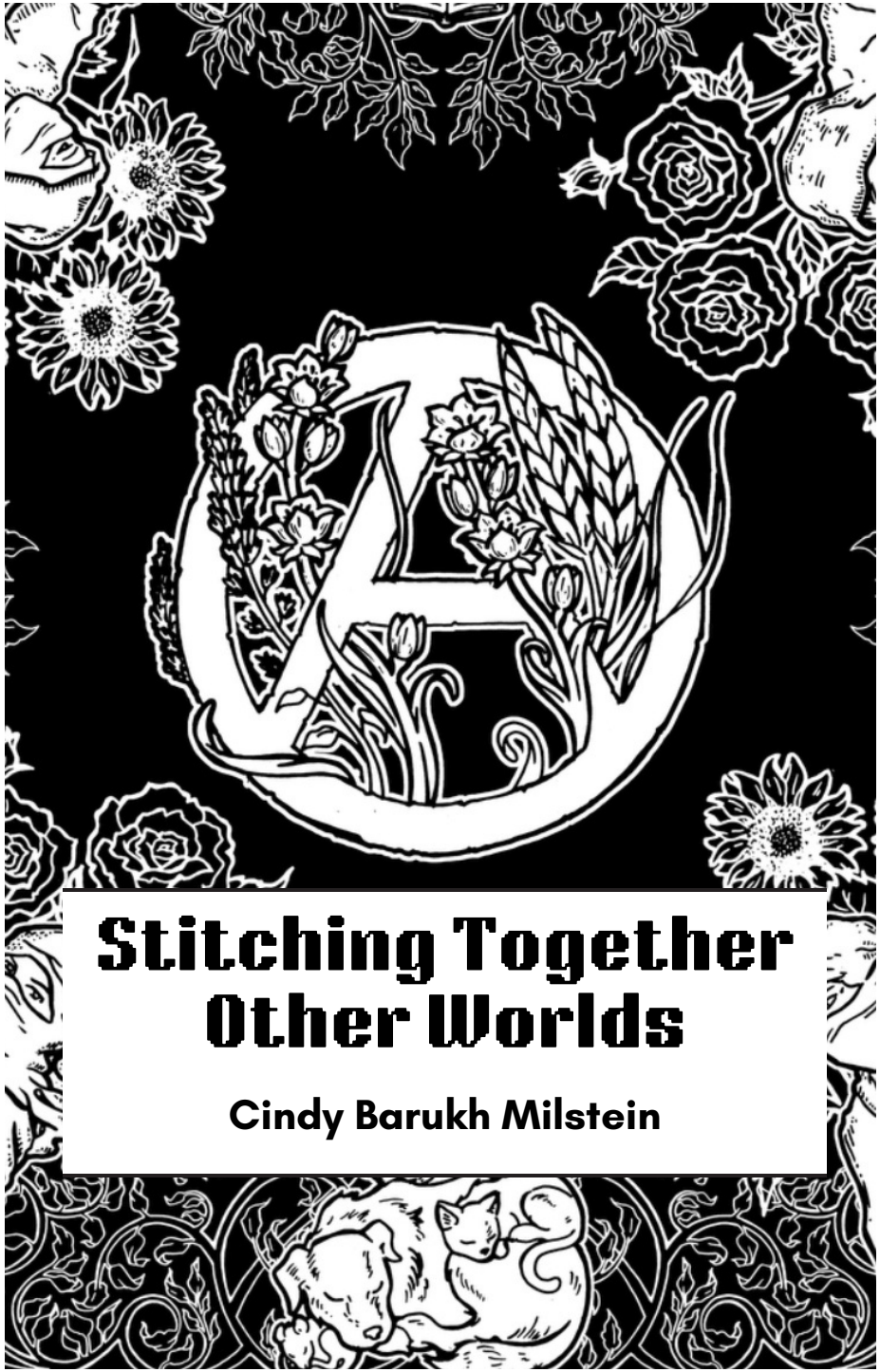
Cindy Barukh Milstein still doesn't quilt. Or maybe they do, in different ways.



This piece was written for and originally published in my edited anthology *Constellations of Care: Anarcha-Feminism in Practice* (Pluto Press, 2024).

The artwork is borrowed from N. O. Bonzo (www.nobonzo.com), with love and solidarity.

their shoes when entering, and artfully laid out all sorts of participatory materials for mourning, from an altar to musical instruments and art supplies. We offered two programmed slots—one focusing on somatics, and the other on talk—but for most of the time, we let folks engage with the space as they needed, with one of us on hand to hold space as desired. Mostly, we witnessed how people brought all of their senses to bear on the space—from sights and sounds, to smells and touch—and all of their emotions—ranging from tears and rage to laughter and love.

What struck me at both bookfairs was how many people—folks I didn't know, and who didn't know me, and had no idea I was part of any of the grief spaces—eagerly wanted to share their joy with me at being there. They went on and on about how friendly anarchists were being toward each other, across all tendencies, offering genuine warmth, playfulness, and openness. They remarked on how refreshed, reconnected, and hopeful they felt thanks to these gatherings, in contrast to the past three years of despair and loss of faith.

I could relay story after story, but one suffices as illustration.

At a magical afterparty held at an enormous community space won through two decades of struggle, one particularly exuberant young person was gushing to me about their day at the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair. "I feel such joy, I can hardly express it," they said, beaming from ear to ear. I asked them to give me an example and suddenly their face turned somber. They spoke of having to fend off fascists in their small town with their small collective for the past three years, amid all the pandemic isolation, and how bleak everything felt before this weekend. "I wasn't sure I was up for a huge event and lots of socializing. Then I saw that grief space. I didn't go in. It was enough to see it and have it there. To have my grief made visible and acknowledged. That felt so genuine, which felt so joyful. It opened me up to joy again." A broad smile returned to their face. "Why do we hide grief? It has such power to bring and keep us together."

banner took pride of place at ACAB, draped from Firestorm's rafters as background for workshops—including "Herbs for the Cycles of Grief" and "Radical Death Care"—and still hangs there to this day, honoring our dead on a daily basis alongside all the standard pleasures of an anarcha-feminist, queer+trans bookstore.

To wander back a bit further in time to February 2023, when those of us on the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair collective were in planning mode, I ran across three queer and/or female anarchists who all wanted to do a grief space. It was not only the dead of winter in a cold city but we were also grappling with recent heavy losses and didn't feel up to going out, so we met on Jitsi, having never met each other before. Over the course of an hour, the body language went from the equivalent of wrapped in a blanket on a couch, slumped over, barely able to look up or participate, to eye contact, enthusiasm and warmth, leaning toward each other. We went from hardly motivated to brainstorming a long list of great ideas. In between, without really intending to, we'd basically held a grief space for ourselves "simply" by talking about what we wanted and needed in one for others. We came with sorrow, and found joy too, and it was as if we'd known each other a long time.

Fast-forward to the bookfair in May 2023, and our little collective set up the biggest, most beautiful grief space I've yet to have the honor of helping to create—and not only that, but it was a sheer pleasure to organize from start to finish. Collectively, we had everything we needed to implement all of our many ideas; we allowed for a plurality of grief modalities and ways of approaching mourning; and when the bookfair was wrapping up, we sat in a circle inside our space to talk about our feelings, what went well, and what we wanted to do better next year—because we already envisioned a future together.

The space itself, outdoors near the main entrance to this gigantic bookfair for the entirety of the weekend, was composed of two pop-up tents with flowing DIY walls of fabrics and gorgeous hand-painted "grief" banners on the outside, along with a table of free anarchistic zines related to suicide, dying, death, and mourning. Inside, we constructed a "floor" of blankets and soft cushions, asked folks to take off

Stitching Together Other Worlds

Cindy Barukh Milstein

For those on the margins, making do with scraps is common sense.

I've no idea if that's what led me, as a preteen and teenager, to take bits of colorful fabric, cut them into triangles and trapezoids and other queered shapes, and stitch them into square patches. The idea was to someday craft enough that I could then sew them together into a patchwork quilt. I made neat, growing stacks of these patches, setting them aside in my closet. Over those years, I had more than enough for many quilts, many times over, but I never started, much less finished, even one.

In parallel with this solo activity, yet stretching back as far as I can remember, I was constantly dreaming up and bringing to life all sorts of otherworldly spaces, also pieced together from scraps, but collaboratively with others. To take just one early example, along with a crew of preteen pals, I self-organized our own theatrical adaptation of *Hansel and Gretel* using the basement of my house as our stage, and naturally felt it was a great idea to drag in hundreds of fallen tree branches that we scavenged outdoors to construct a full-on forest indoors. In our version, as I recall, we celebrated kids running away from insufferable situations and trying to live by caring for each other (via foraging and candy), with the witch as an accomplice—not villain. Yet the real magical transformation was that a dusty cellar filled with

abandoned things could become a leafy wooded paradise overflowing with friends.

In hindsight, weaving beautiful social fabrics has been a contiguous thread running through my life. I realize now, though, why I never completed a quilt: one shouldn't have to do it alone; moreover, the insidiousness of how patriarchy socializes us all made me "feminize" and thus devalue my hand-sewn patches as any sort of contribution. It feels metaphorically accurate that I hid them away in a closet, making my own handiwork invisible. I didn't yet understand that every labor of love can be a small piece of something much bigger, wholly at cross-purposes with the current social order, when we intentionally and collectively suture those parts into a whole. We have all the material we need, right in our scrappy hands.

Take the implicitly rebellious history of quilting.

This "women's work" was, for centuries, not merely a necessity in terms of supplying households of modest means with blankets. Crucially, it allowed female and queer folks to create their own social, cultural, and political space in the form of what has come to be called "quilting bees." Here, those relegated to the so-called domestic sphere came together to collectivize their scraps and labor, literally and figuratively sewing communal comfort for each other, and in the process, making room for themselves in a world that typically shut them out. While stitching, they could exchange everything from recipes and home remedies, to their problems and fears, to news and gossip, or skills and other resources. They could tell each other stories of hardship or harm, and from there, lend each other protection or intervention; or swap stories of loss and grief, and offer emotional care; or spin tales of joy, dreams, and aspirations, likely fomenting all sorts of resistance to achieve their visions.

Frequently, these bees turned into community events, bringing what would otherwise be invisible efforts into the light of day, including via folks embroidering their own stories as images on quilts. That kind of radical comfort made its way, for instance, into the AIDS memorial quilt, an idea emerging from street demos following the 1978 assassination of gay San Francisco supervisor Harvey Milk and the resultant riots as a

mourn our losses, as part and parcel of everything else we self-organize, we're extra clear-eyed about what and for whom we're fighting, from the living to our ancestors; we proactively mend ourselves and this world; and we keep love and life at the heart of all we do. Moreover, we're far better able to stick side by side with each other, tightening our interrelationships so as to get through the most excruciating of times.

Still, I often felt too alone in that task while wandering around doing hundreds of grief circles, and felt "crazy" seeing how much damage was wrought by us not doing the collective work of grief. Yet I was wrong. I wasn't completely alone; other anarchists had also felt called toward this task. And to wind my way back to those two, most joyous of anarchist events—Another Carolina Anarchist Bookfair (ACAB) and the Montreal Anarchist Bookfair—those isolated labors had now coalesced into shared efforts. Making space for grief was as integral a component as, say, tabling, food, and parties, thanks especially to feministic anarchists on both collectives.

At ACAB, held in Asheville in August 2023, the organizing collective had intentionally scheduled not just one but instead three workshops related to dying, death, and mourning, with my grief circle kicking off the bookfair to set the tone. A regional collective that includes anarchist gravediggers and casket makers was invited to craft a custom altar, which sat outside the front door of Firestorm Books, one of the main venues for the entire weekend. And given that ACAB's first day fell on the sixth anniversary of Charlottesville, a friend from nearby Durham, NC, brought an enormous banner made around that time that read, "We struggle in memory of all we've lost to white supremacy and fascism." The banner was painted soon after Heather Heyer was murdered, and so many others were deeply injured and forever scarred, by fascists during the Unite the Right in August 2017. It was originally hung from the ten-foot-high stone base of the first Confederate monument that folks tore down in North Carolina, and later, on the one-year anniversary of that monument falling, it was hung up again—this time as part of an altar with names and flowers and candles around it, and folks read the names of people killed by the police in Durham. The

Contemporary anarchism has, to its detriment, followed too obediently in the footsteps of the hegemonic death-denying culture we've been boxed into, largely abandoning rituals, most especially ones related to grief, and so leaving our losses and feelings around them largely unprocessed. When unprocessed, feelings don't just go away. They build up until they explode—whether inside ourselves and/or at each other.

Those "explosions" have been keenly palpable since the onset of COVID-19. The numbers of suicides, road-rage accidents, overdoses, and the like have skyrocketed, even as the dominant culture—so adept at producing mass death—further isolated folks from each other and urged a return to "normal." Anarchists, too, yearned to go back to our normal, such as bookfairs and social centers, uprisings and frontline camps, but vastly underestimated how much the collective trauma had touched us, and thus did little to deeply think through, much less implement, what needed to shift in our own convergences. And with little to no ritualistic mechanisms to fall back on to journey through our own layers of loss and grief together, too many anarchists blew up at each other, destroyed their own beloved projects, and further dissociated from their own sorrow as well as joy.

This attitude of ignoring grief at our own peril really hit home for me, personally and painfully, some eleven years ago, when I needed to caretake my simultaneously dying parents for about thirteen months. I thought I had a big, solid anarchist community, but it disappeared almost overnight. I was met instead with, "Come back when you're done," as if death and mourning were somehow outside our circles and friendships, and as if we could or should ever be "done" with grief, which is another name for what we love. That's why I threw myself into "rebellious mourning," in words and deeds, soon afterward.* Because too much of what we love—the majority, I'd argue—is unnecessarily taken from us by this death cult of a social order. When we explicitly

* Cindy Milstein, ed., *Rebellious Mourning: The Collective Work of Grief* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008).

way to honor the dead and fight for the living during a "silence equals death" pandemic that killed off so many gay and gender-nonconforming people.

The point isn't that every quilt equals revolution. It's that we shouldn't minimize the potential of what can feel like small, individual patches of practices, whether on our own or with tiny circles of friends and neighbors. We shouldn't make invisible the kinds of liminal, messy-beautiful time-spaces we make for our crafting and scheming, whether they produce material embodiments as a result, and/or the essential immateriality of reciprocal comfort and care, aiding us to be coconspirators in mending this world. And when displayed together—like the AIDS quilt, which stretches for miles now and was toured at the start of another pandemic, COVID, which in turn sparked a wave of mutual aid and summer of uprising—we realize that we are indeed everything we need and want and desire. We ourselves sow possibilities, and ones that can get us through the coldest and darkest of days and nights.

So here's a small sampler—what's usually dismissed as ultimately forming a "crazy quilt," without design or intention, when viewed from the vantage point of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and other tools of violence that rip us to shreds. Yet through the lens of dignity, life, and freedom, it's the stuff of weaving a perfectly beautiful, anarcha-feminist pattern.*

* This sampler is based solely on my own recollections, filtered through the mists of time. It does not mean to imply a seamless experience; like all feministic anarchist experiments, these have their share of flaws and heartbreaks. Still, it's crucial to recognize those time-spaces when we feel as if we're already inhabiting the kinds of social and organizational relations that we so desire and deserve.

7

The beloved project ended, badly. It split into two halves that could never again form a whole, if it ever did. More precisely, one-half had to leave because the other half had, over the years, organized as if in a cloud-cuckoo-land, not wanting to venture past its own political dogmatism, internal power dynamics, and patriarchal behaviors (despite rhetoric to the contrary), or inability to deal with the reality of mundane logistics like paying the bills. Our half had brought vibrancy to this project, not only renewing it in many ways, but doing the lion's share of the self-organizing and communal care to make it happen. In the end, we became, to borrow from Ursula K. Le Guin, "the ones who walk[ed] away" from what had, for us, so often felt utopian, knowing that our departure also spelled the death of this longtime, remarkably transformative space for hundreds of other anarchists from around the world.

Similar to the conclusion of Le Guin's short story, we couldn't yet imagine what alternative universe we were journeying toward, though, mostly because our hearts were so heavy. "It is possible it does not exist," observes Le Guin. "But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away."

What we knew, as genderqueer friends and even chosen family, was that we had to process our loss together. We had to rest and regroup, play and rethink. And as part of that, on one sunny day, we circled up around a table outside a bakery in our tiny town, ourselves a tiny crew, to eat and brainstorm. What did we want to see emerge out of the ashes and lessons of the project we'd just left? Over the next year, five years, or even ten? And crucially, what did we want to promise each other about how to do the next project(s) differently so as to actually embody our ethics, especially around organizing as if social relations matter? Felt-tip markers transferred our musings onto big sheets of butcher-block paper, which quickly filled with seemingly unattainable strivings.

Soon after, serendipitously, some folks starting an anarchistic all-

and savvy, are engaging in joint defense, whether legally or ethically.

Each of these minor interactions—most taking only a few minutes—have to date, time and time again, not only held our solidarity in place. They seem to be mitigating unnecessary suffering—the kind we too often inflict on each other when the boot of repression presses down on us, rather than directing our hostilities at the correct target, the state—while accentuating the quality of care we just see as the culture of everyday anarchism.

When the charges are hopefully all dropped, it's possible to already imagine this culture carrying forward, as second nature, into the next battle.

6

The two most joyous anarchist gatherings I've experienced since the pandemic began both made the most amount of room for grief. And I wasn't alone in that assessment.

That might sound paradoxical. How can sorrow and joy commingle? How can we find the greatest sense of a harmonious whole by publicly curating space for both anguish and delight?

For most of human history, people practiced an abundance of intricate, culturally embedded communal rituals and sacred spaces to not only get them through every transition, good and bad, but also make sense of those shifts. Such ceremonies, from festivals to funerals, were inseparable parts of a healthy ecosystem. They (re)generated, sustained, and affirmed life and its cycles, giving them dignity and meaning. They let people immerse themselves in the entire spectrum of human emotions, which in actuality don't fit neatly into experiences but instead are bound up in the highs and lows of them all. Alas, among the many wisdoms lost when our elaborate rituals were stolen over the centuries by the powers-that-be, whether by assimilation or annihilation, was this: rituals, which bring out all the pieces of ourselves, are essential as the reparative and restorative glue of fully living.

a sense of shared purpose.

When in order to "do our job" (voluntarily of course) as jail support folks, we had to watch hours of court hearings on live YouTube feeds, with our comrades, movement, and politics being painted by the red-baiting prosecutor as "terrorist," two therapists held a virtual "processing space" afterward. Not only did this single, humble session gift us with something we didn't even think we needed, but once we began talking/crying, we clearly did; it fast reaffirmed that we, too, as solidarity "workers" were seen and appreciated.

When a family member of a current codefendant was falling apart from worry about their beloved, a family member of a now-ex-codefendant from the J20 days spoke with them. Not only did this single, modest phone call hopefully go a little way to supplying the kind of empathy and understanding that only comes from a shared, unique experience; it repaid forward something that this J20 family member had constructively critiqued as wanting for themselves and not getting back then—that is, support for the impacts on the codefendants' kin.

Indeed, when folks see that someone in our solidarity circles, no matter their role, is struggling—such as because of a fresh loss, mental health challenge, or overwhelm and exhaustion—it's almost commonplace to simply reach out to them, one on one—if at a distance, by sending a loving voice message, say; if nearby, by putting a consensual arm around their shoulder and encouraging them to breathe. Not only do these single, simple gestures aid in deactivating some of the worst edges of, for instance, grief or anxiety; they almost instantly reinstill feelings of not being alone, or conversely, being interconnected.

Or when rumors begin to fly, there seems to always be someone offering a calm reminder that we can deal with any solid information that arises—we have everything we need among us to handle what gets thrown at us—but rumors only whip up fear and panic, and can lead to harming other supporters/codefendants, breaking trust, and/or hasty, bad decisions. Or someone will serenely volunteer to look into the rumor and follow up with facts. Not only do these single, levelheaded responses ease the added emotional turmoil that rumors catalyze; they quickly reinscribe the knowledge that a lot of folks, with a ton of skills

ages café and community hub asked if we wanted a small room on the second floor above them, along with access to hosting events in their space. Thus our all-volunteer, no-profit, collectively run Black Sheep Books was born, with both projects opening their doors on the same day. We eventually outgrew our spot and moved about a block away, into a storefront already painted red and black. And five years after our mutual grand opening, the café and Black Sheep ended, but well.

At some point during that time, us Black Sheepers looked over our now-rumpled list of dreams and were startled to realize that we'd achieved so much of what we wanted, materially, organizationally, and politically, plus ahead of "schedule." But what felt best was that we'd lived up to our promises, even when it was hard, or when different ones of us were going through tough times. Those promises were numerous, yet one jumps out in particular: entering into and exiting collective efforts with intentionality and empathy, and checking in every six months to be sure we all felt good about each other, what we were doing, and continuing to go forward together. This involved making good on our promises of, say, communal care and good communication, but importantly, it was grounded in our shared recognition that both the project and each of us had to grow alongside each other, even if that meant consensually disassociating when Black Sheep wasn't nourishing for us, our communities, and/or our aims anymore.

So we had many an open and honest conversation in that last year, including through breakups, heartache, and depression, and knew that while Black Sheep could have forged ahead, it shouldn't. We ended while we still appreciated each other; we ended without being in debt, and in fact, seeded several other new anarchist projects in our town with the leftover funds; and we ended by each of us moving toward other horizons. It felt sad, yet in a way that could be integrated, and didn't erase each other or the joy in what we'd created together. And it ended with an anarchistic marching band, going between the bookstore and café in a celebratory, musical "funeral" march for us and the community around us.

2

It was not a safe space. How could it (pretend to) be?

Not only was it smack-dab in the center of the intensive war zone that was "gentrification," aka displacement and dispossession, in San Francisco. But our space was not immune from causing harm to ourselves and others. After all, every anarchist, no matter where they live, has been shaped and socialized in, and traumatized by, the violent social order.

Instead, from the first moment I pressed the doorbell on the grated-metal door, directly across the street from the chaos of the best and worst of humanity on the 16th Street BART Plaza, and looked through to see zines haphazardly tossed on a small shelf, then walked up the two interior flights of rundown stairs lined with militant posters from around the globe, to next enter into an enormous room decorated with banners and abuzz with activity—a room that vibrantly multi-purposed as both infoshop, event, and organizing space as well as living room, kitchen, and set in the corner, bathrooms—it felt deeply like coming home. Then it became home. And now it may always be the closest thing to home for me, even though eviction stole it out of anarchist hands.

It felt homey precisely because everything feels unsafe in this world, and the Station 40 collective, through a rotating cast of twenty to twenty-four housemate-characters and countless guests, somehow squeezed into eight bedrooms and lots of nooks, held to this agreement: "We're not a safe space. But when shit happens, we promise to deal with it."

Because shit will and did happen. And dealing with that by not involving the cops and state, nor lashing out at each other, takes experimentation and dedication—including making mistakes—through the ins and outs of daily life. So while my housemates mostly prided themselves on being and going "hard," their demeanor extended to being rock-hard solid when it came to the "soft" practices of collective care and solidarity in ways I've rarely experienced before or after.

Take #StopCopCity in so-called Atlanta. For all the many imaginative "diversity of tactics" that have so marked this inspiring movement over the past couple of years, perhaps the most overlooked is its self-generated "culture of care," which seems to be almost a given, especially within the solidarity efforts. The more that the cops, courts, and governments have ramped up serious, albeit absurd, charges against forest defenders, and particularly after the statist assassination of Tortuguita on January 18, 2023, mourning ceremonies and communal rituals, in-person care clinics, mutual aid therapy and peer-to-peer emotional support, medicinal herbs, and various other healing arts have only multiplied. Like everything else in this struggle to #DefendTheWeelauneeForest, all of this care is autonomously self-organized and offered with a generosity of spirit as well as prefigurative sensibility.

Those bigger, more visible direct actions of care are touching, of course, and go a long way to explaining why #StopCopCity has not only captured so many hearts and minds but also been so relatively long-lived, growing to embrace people from many different walks of life. What's felt so transformative, though, are the innumerable smaller, everyday direct actions of care that seem hardly worth remarking on or even taking note of—not out of lack of appreciation, but because they've coalesced into a shared culture of communal care that we're now so deeply embedded in, it's like the air we breath within the solidarity efforts. Or more precisely, it's like a warm hug when things feel stressful—or for that matter, joyful too, or indeed when things feel all sorts of ways because of the ravages of state repression.

To take a few "breaths" as examples:

When a large Signal thread full of supporters started filling up with gratuitously mean-spirited texts related to some genuine conundrum we were grappling with, one person matter-of-factly observed that the state has a long history of employing counter-intelligence tactics against us. They noted that we can and should engage in disagreements over tough issues, but in ways that don't play into the state's divide-and-conquer schemes. Not only did this single, succinct text serve to de-escalate; it almost immediately reinstalled a

showing up as their whole, vulnerable selves with and for each other. Most of those who weren't or hadn't previously been anarchists before #StopSpencer credited us anarchists with supplying the care and solidarity they needed to find their own strength, allowing them to go further than they ever thought they could. And crucially, processing together works wonders.

Care works, including in the fight to hinder fascism.

S

There were so many times during #DefendJ20 when it felt like the state was sitting back, laughing at us, watching codefendants and their supporters tear each other apart. I knew it was the intense emotional strain of some two hundred people facing the possibility of seventy-five years behind bars after being mass arrested during #Disrupt20 at Trump's 2017 inauguration that caused the internal fractures, acrimony, and even downright nastiness as the weeks turned into months of us trying to sustain our DIY solidarity infrastructure. It's not that J20 codefendants weren't supported with a tremendous amount of love and solidarity—legal, material, and immaterial. But on the regular, there wasn't a feministic commitment to gently, skillfully, and carefully intervening at the first sign that the statist stress was being misplaced onto our own dynamics.

To this day, I'm proud that a core of us supporters—"coincidentally," a majority of which were queer and/or female—stuck it to out, even if the end was bittersweet: collective defense mostly held and the charges were dropped, thank goodness, but unprocessed trauma and antagonisms within ex-J20 circles lingered on.

State repression is good for that: first creating immense fear among those targeted, then dragging out the costly (to us) proceedings, and then waiting for the fear itself to do the work of destroying or at least severely harming us.

But not always. Maybe we've learned, including from our mistakes.

Station 40 was far from perfect, or easy, or always kind. It could feel like a war zone inside our doors, too, at times. "Shit" occurred routinely given that we were a hub for anarchism in the Bay Area at that period. Pretty much every intense thing that could happen, did happen. But I learned, time and again, that when the going gets excruciatingly tough, I wasn't alone, nor did I have to slip into being the lone caretaker. Moreover, "care work" was neither made invisible nor gendered but rather felt like the hearth, as it were, of our home—even if that care didn't look warm and fuzzy, such as false promises of "safe space." In fact, some of the housemates who showed me, personally, the most tender care and deep reciprocity had the crankiest, coldest, hardest shell (or so they fronted).

Yet those shells became shields of mutual self-defense and protection at a moment's notice when faced with threats to our house and/or potential perils to housemates, friends, and comrades. Our space, through which likely thousands of anarchists and like-minded folks passed, and that defied the typical face of anarchism—with its eclectic and wide-ranging mix of races, cultures, genders, ages, and so much more that somehow meshed so well—almost invariably lived up in queer-feministic practice to the slogan "Be careful with each so we can be dangerous together."

That looked like, for example, knowing that our lengthy rectangular kitchen table—at the heart of Station 40—was open for any and all topics, including many that would have been off-limits or politically incorrect in most antiauthoritarian spaces. Over big meals or after 11:00 p.m. in particular, we spent many a night wrestling with dilemmas, in lively, provocative, and generative dialogues. Those raucous, no-holds-barred conversations helped us grow. Together, we felt comfortable scrutinizing and challenging various "safe" positions in the wider anarchist world—positions that other comrades frequently took up unthinkingly, for one, but also positions that ultimately put anarchists and others in further harm's way (for example, via essentialized notions of identity that broke down our solidarities).

It looked, too, like us acting in concert, each playing their accomplished part without a conductor, such as when police suddenly

raided our home during a big, crowded event. Everyone simultaneously leaped into action, taking on roles that fit their skill sets. That meant that we had everything we needed, within minutes, to lockdown our space, mobilize lawyers and community to show up outside, and spirit away what or who needed special protection while deciding on our strategy, yet equally, to calm our many guests and offer emotional support as needed.

Or it looked like us collectively fighting outbreaks of bedbugs, eradicating the infestations by relying on our own research and self-organization, being transparent with the wider community and at times responsibly shutting down our space to visitors, and aiding each other with the many tedious tasks necessary to ensure success. It meant trying to turn this tragedy into humor as well, from dubbing it our "social war" to jokingly imagining our neighbors all setting their bedbug-infested mattresses alight at intersections for a street party against evictions as well as to scare off the invasive tech bros driving rents sky high.

Or it looked like intimate caretaking in the most unsafe of situations for an individual, such as our whole household holding empathetic space for a housemate actively contemplating suicide over a twenty-four-hour period and finding them the consensual resources they needed to decide to live.

Shit happened. And together, we got through it as safely as possible.

3

Maybe it was the open, multilevel, hundred-plus-year-old barn that sparked our "cultivating care" framework. After all, anyone driving by it on the wooded road, friend or foe, could see right into the charmingly ramshackle structure, making this now-longtime radical space feel equal parts beautiful and vulnerable. It was clearly a magical location for our anarchist summer school. But the magic wasn't simply "there," like this barn built decades ago by unknown others. As an organizing

empowered to be there on March 5, on whatever terms and by taking up whatever roles felt most consensual to them. The result was not simply that our city brought out the most people, and in affinity crews, but also that those folks felt as comfortable and prepared as one can when facing off with cops and fascists.

During: As we'd taught other affinity groups to do, my collective had spent hours ahead of time talking honestly about our fears and preferred levels of engagement at #StopSpencer. Based on that, we'd created layers of a buddy system, off-site meeting point, secure communication, jail support forms, and backup plans, among other things, plus had agreed to arrive and leave together. And we did that over a fun evening of banner making and food in the warmth of a collective member's house, further nourishing our friendships and the deep culture of care among us. On the "battlefield" (in this case, a cornfield behind what's known as Moo U) that March 5, our bonds meant that we could simply look each other in the eye and know what needed to dynamically shift or who needed extra solidarity. All the care work put into building the #StopSpencer coalition and other statewide social relationships among organizers, though, meant that many of us—beyond our own affinity crews—could do the same. Time and again, through eye contact or body language, people aided others in calming down or stepping back when needed, or crews felt braver than anticipated and moved closer to the front line with the complementary support of other affinity groups. In the heat and intensity of this real battle, communal defense was inseparable from communal care.

After: It wasn't planned, but in the week after #StopSpencer, we not only celebrated what was a victory on multiple levels—Spencer canceled his tour, some prominent fascist groups unraveled, no one was shot or killed by cops or white supremacists (a real worry), and we forged loads of new mutualistic infrastructure and projects, to name some. We also dived gratefully into one debrief after another, large and small, in public spaces and private ones. For even though we won, the tension and trauma of being so close to heavily armed cops and fascists still brought up big feelings. Three things stuck out during our debriefs. People were deeply committed to this form of aftercare,

needed large numbers of people—far beyond our confederation of anarchist groups in a half-dozen Michigan cities—we spent months making those arguments in a form that might not be recognizable as such. We asserted, in deeds not words, solidarity and care.

That wasn't without some contention with our own anarchist circles. Strains of machismo maintained that "care" wasn't radical. That attitude, in turn, meant that some patriarchal behaviors crept in, elevating "defense" and those who prioritized it, while at times denying "solidarity" to those of us focusing on communal care (though never doing so on the streets thankfully). Remarkably, however, we all understood the big picture—smashing fascism—and the necessity of outreach to build momentum and, on the big day, numbers. So ultimately, for and through this antifascist win, we all took care to make it work (double meaning intended!), before, during, and after #StopSpencer.

This manifested in so many ways, it would be impossible to capture, and such tender direct actions of care are better lived than described. But a few examples should provide an idea.

Before: The collective I was part of, in the town with the most amount of organizing toward March 5, joined in a coalition among a wide range of political tendencies, with the majority of folks falling somewhere on the liberal spectrum, new to activism, never mind antifascism. Many had never been to a demonstration, or at least not one where the risk of heavily armed cops and fascists was so palpable. Our collective already had the trust of most activists in our town due to how we'd consistently shown up, and as the most imaginative, savvy, and welcoming of mischief makers. So we put that trust to work, with patience and humility, first listening to why most people in the coalition were so hesitant to actually be present in person to #StopSpencer; second, really hearing and believing them, with empathy not annoyance; and finally, offering weeks of mentorship. Because when we listened, it came down to two reasons: not so much their liberal or social democratic sensibilities, as we'd thought, but fear and lack of experience. Through trainings, one-on-one conversations, and myriad other support, we gave them the knowledge, skills, and wisdom to feel

collective, we had to continually tend to the floorboards and support beams, literally and figuratively, to conjure it up. And that ongoing "repair work" had to be something that everyone who participated in the camp for three summers proactively engaged in side by side.

How, though, could we encourage everyone to be tinkerers, and with what tool kits? There were so many devices we wanted to pack into the programming—history, strategic thinking, hands-on direct action skills, play, and more. Way too much for an eight-day camp. Yet perhaps the most crucial tool turned out to be something that is not usually ready-to-hand in most anarchist spaces: being vulnerable with each other, and as the foundation for everything else.

From the opening circle on, held in the embrace of the ancient barnwood that had once been a canopy of trees for other ecosystems, we welcomed and modeled the painstaking yet joyful work of everyone striving to be the person they aspire to be, sharing the fullness of themselves and their gifts. We took up what might seem like antiquated tools—such as opening up our hearts and minds to each other, challenging ourselves to grow in generative ways including by leaning into discomfort, and remembering that anarchism and life are messy-beautiful processes—so as to see and get to know each other as multidimensional, messy-beautiful people. We emphasized that community isn't a prefab, static entity; it's something we all directly and dynamically cultivate together. So we invited everyone, for the duration of camp, to experiment wholeheartedly, tenderly, and in ways we usually only dream about with "caring for each like we're already in a new, do-it-ourselves world."

That's how the magic appeared. Which is another way of saying that otherworldly social relations emerged.

On that ground, we experienced all sorts of otherworldly conversations, dances, campfires, rituals, and silliness, otherworldly learning, adventuring, grieving, and creating, otherworldly good troublemaking and inspiration. And when we stumbled into difficult territory over the course of those three summers in that barn, we chose otherworldly ways of journeying through it. We chose empathy and trust.

We chose love.*

So during our last, pre-pandemic summer when one participant ignored many people's boundaries—from emotional to logistical, material to physical—and kept violating consent, we chose to see everyone—all of us—as perfectly imperfect people always capable of transformation. We chose to strive to not merely do no further harm but rather aid each other in breaking patterns that arise from and/or cause trauma in ourselves and others. And even though we had, in the end, to ask that person to leave camp, we didn't dehumanize them or leave them out of these aspirations. Instead, we let love guide us.

The ins and outs of how we did this aren't reducible to a how-to list, in the same way that love can't and shouldn't be quantified. That's almost certainly why this "accountability process" worked better than the vast majority of them. It wasn't a formulaic process; instead, it was embedded in bonds of love, expansively understood and intentionally nurtured by everyone's willingness to open up to and with each other. As such, we didn't begin or end by broadcasting rumor or drama to the whole camp. We didn't cancel anyone or make anyone disposable. We didn't think or act through binaries of good/bad, nor a carceral or punishment logic.

We listened. We believed. We held space for everyone's life stories, including the person who was pushing boundaries, and how people's past experiences shaped their present behaviors, feelings, and reactions. We held space, too, for how violations of consent can bring up a lot for everyone, whether receiver, giver, or eyewitness to the harm. We brought curiosity to how those stories and experiences can butt up against each other, intentionally or not, and how much this world that we so long to change has such power to turn us into people we don't want to be or can't see we've become.

Almost organically, like gently tossing a pebble into a mirrorlike pond and letting interdependent circles ripple out outward, we threw

* I'm borrowing loosely from the title of Kai Cheng Thom's *I Hope We Choose Love: A Trans Girl's Notes from the End of the World* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019).

ourselves compassionately and self-reflectively into the fabric of our social relations, which we'd been cultivating before and during camp, and let circles of mutualistic care ripple outward. Those circles let us each take on what we felt we could, and what we felt we could contribute, and equally at times, encircled us when we couldn't take on various tasks, or even more profoundly, helped us see when we couldn't or shouldn't take on various tasks. Those circles embraced everyone in differential yet interdependent ways, during and well beyond camp, including the person who seemingly couldn't maintain boundaries. And those circles—the ones we ourselves had built—saw us all as deserving of dignity, solidarity, and love, even if we need to not share space sometimes.

Richard Spencer's cross-country speaking tour at US colleges was put to a screeching halt by thousands of "little" acts of antifascist care.

Of course, what the headlines will tell you is quite different: "Violence Erupts on MSU Campus as Richard Spencer Speaks"; "Fights Break out at Michigan State [University] as Protesters, White Supremacists Converge for Richard Spencer Speech." And alas, some of the more bro-ey antifascists who contributed to this wildly successful deplatforming effort would largely agree, pointing to the fighting—the physical community self-defense—as what did the trick on March 5, 2018. Not that throwing punches at a neo-Nazi, antisemitic conspiracy theorist, and white supremacist such as Spencer is bad or wrong; often it's strategically wise and tactically necessary. Fascism tends not to listen to "reasoned" arguments, contrary to what liberals like to believe.

But sometimes liberals, including progressive and social democratic ones, can be moved by compelling arguments to actively and consensually take direct action against fascism. And so when we heard Spencer's tour was slated to come to East Lansing, and anarchist(ic) folks knew that if we hoped to squash his mobilization, we